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TAGS: OPRC KMDR KPAO TW
SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S.-TAIWAN RELATIONS

¶1. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused their coverage May 13-15 on the conclusion of President Chen Shui-bian's nine-day overseas trip; Premier Su Tseng-chang's decision to suspend the chairman of the Financial Supervisory Commission, who was released on bail after questioning by prosecutors; alleged involvement by President Chen's son-in-law in illegal stock transactions; and other local issues. The pro-status quo "China Times" ran a banner headline on page two May 13 that read "In Response to Zoellick's Remarks about '[Taiwan] Hitting a Wall,' Bian: Status Quo of Cross-Straight Peace Is Two Countries on Both Sides." The newspaper also ran an exclusive news story on page four May 13 with the headline: "For Taiwan's Future Leaders, United States Has High Hopes for Ma and Su; But Doubts About the Two Persons' Lines." The pro-unification "United Daily News" ran a banner headline on page four May 13 that said "Bian Returns to Taiwan: Transits of United States Will No Longer Be Focus of [His] Overseas Trips." The pro-independence "Liberty Times," Taiwan's biggest daily, on the other hand, ran a banner-headline news story on page three May 13 that read "Bian: One-Time Uproar Will Not Jeopardize Taiwan-U.S. Relations." The pro-independence "Taiwan Daily" also front-paged May 13 the results of an opinion survey by the DPP last Friday, which showed 66 percent of respondents said they support President Chen Shui-bian's foreign trip this time.

¶2. In terms of editorials and commentaries, a "Liberty Times" news analysis urged the government not to listen to whatever the U.S. said unconditionally in order to safeguard Taiwan's interests. A "United Daily News" editorial said Washington has ruthlessly torn down Chen's two-pronged strategy by clearly indicating its opposition to Taiwan independence. A "China Times" opinion piece said Washington will closely monitor Taiwan's every move in the next two years. An editorial in the limited-circulation, pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" urged Taipei and Washington to build mature relations. An editorial in the limited-circulation, pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" praised Chen's trip and his stopover in Libya as a great success. End summary.

A) "To Safeguard Taiwan's Interests, Must Not Listen to Whatever the United States Says"

Journalist Tsou Jiing-wen commented in a news analysis in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 600,000] (5/15):

"The topic of President Chen's transits of the United States this time offered a wonderful opportunity to review how both countries should normalize their interaction from now on. It may be necessary [for Taiwan] to mend and restore its relations with the United States, but strategically, it is by no means in Taiwan's best

interests to listen to whatever the United States says unconditionally.

"Many people mistakenly believe that Taiwan needs the United States more. But in reality, the United States constantly needs Taiwan's 'cooperation' under the table, and many examples show that Taiwan had to sacrifice itself just to please the United States. From now on, the government should make a comprehensive review of such examples and return to the 'normal track' of maintaining [Taiwan's] national interests. The United States is after all Taiwan's biggest supporter in terms of the island's security. Taiwan must treat it with courtesy and act like a gentleman. But in private, the government must quickly work out a list based on Taiwan's public opinion and carefully review whether it is necessary for Taiwan to have been excessively 'obedient to the United States' over the past few years. ..."

B) "United States Is Opposed to Taiwan Independence! Is Taiwan Independence Opposed to the United States?"

The pro-unification "United Daily News" [circulation: 400,000] editorialized (5/13):

"... Chen Shui-bian has been acting as if he were a 'flag bearer for Taiwan independence' inside Taiwan, but he dares not admit to the international community that he is a 'Taiwan independence activist.' This time, however, the United States ruthlessly tore down Chen's two-pronged strategy, and Washington's related discourse has never been so clear: First, the United States is anti-Taiwan independence because 'independence means war.' Second, Chen is a Taiwan independence activist and he has no credibility at all. The fact that Chen wants to challenge the 'one China' policy that was fixed on by the United States long ago is 'running into a wall.' Third, the United States supports 'Taiwan', but 'on the other hand, this will not encourage those who attempt to lead Taiwan toward independence (i.e., Chen).' Based on these three points, Washington's position is consistent and logical: It opposes Taiwan independence and Taiwan independence activist Chen Shui-bian. ..."

C) "Why Did the United States Make Harsh Criticism [Against Taiwan]?"

Professor Edward Chen of Tamkang University's Graduate Institute of American Studies opined in the pro-status quo "China Times" [circulation: 400,000] (5/13):

"U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick and AIT Taipei Director Stephen Young each made some remarks recently regarding [Washington's] cross-Straight policy, which revealed something new and profound. ... As the key person in charge of the United States' China policy, Zoellick pointed out that the United States does not support Taiwan independence or dance to the tune of Taiwan's politicians because independence means war and that American soldiers would sacrifice their lives. On the same day, when addressing the American Chamber of Commerce in Taipei, Young carelessly said 'Zoellick is opposed to Taiwan independence.' Whether Young simply misspoke or was speaking from the bottom of his heart remains to be seen. ...

"... Zoellick's testimony indicated that the United States will closely monitor Taiwan's every move in the next two years. On the same day, Young echoed Zoellick by stressing that Taiwan should be very careful in handling its constitutional changes and should not touch on the Taiwan independence topic, or it will arouse Washington's concern. ... While Zoellick emphasized that Washington will restrain Taiwan independence on the frontline, Young directly talked about Washington's role in pushing for direct transportation across the Taiwan Strait. Young said in his speech that the United States is happy to see that cross-Straight trade issues such as direct transportation are discussed in a democratic way and formulated into policy. These are, without a doubt, the clearest remarks that U.S. officials have ever made with regard to direct transportation [across the Taiwan Strait]. ...

D) "Building Mature U.S.-Taiwan Ties"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" [circulation: 20,000] editorialized (5/15):

"... Zoellick's alarmist rhetoric shows that he is seemingly unable to appreciate that Taiwan is already an independent and democratic country and that the efforts of the Chen administration aim to safeguard, not 'move toward' or 'declare' independence and to preserve the peaceful status quo in the Taiwan Strait. Instead, Zoellick ignores the fact that only one side of the Taiwan Strait is rapidly building up offensive military forces and threatening a war, and that side is not Taiwan. It is critical for President Chen's Democratic Progressive Party administration to continue to work to build and consolidate trust with Washington, but the Bush administration should also display fairer treatment and understanding toward President Chen and his government and the difficulties they face in defending Taiwan's international space than shown by Washington's handling of the transit issue and by Zoellick's unfounded remarks. ...

"Washington should not demand that Taiwan leaders wait until PRC military forces occupy the presidential palace before announcing that the precondition to the 'five noes' has been violated. It is also necessary for a mature Taiwan democracy to have the capacity and courage to formulate and defend its own foreign policy perspectives and interests based on our own democratic values and engage in mature dialogue with Washington on this foundation.

"For its part, the Bush administration must keep in mind the importance of striking a balance between its engagement with the authoritarian PRC and the necessity of continuing to support Taiwanese democracy. Instead of simply pressuring President Chen and the DPP administration to avoid 'rocking the boat,' the Bush administration must introduce concrete measures to constrain Beijing's continued expansion of its missile deployments and other offensive forces targeting Taiwan and rein in its diplomatic saber rattling against Taipei's international space. Washington may overlook the danger of China's military buildup and its threats against Taiwan and choose to portray Chen's expressions of concern over these trends as nothing more than electoral rhetoric, but the 23 million Taiwan people simply cannot stand by and wait until such threats become a 'clear and present danger.'"

E) "Naysayers Ignore Chen's Success"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] wrote in an editorial (5/14):

"... Chen's decision to go ahead with the stopover in Libya, and the possibility of building closer ties with that country, was obviously based on pragmatic, strategic and self-interest considerations alone. So far, Taiwan's 'good image' has not helped the nation win formal diplomatic recognition from foreign nations and respect within the international community. There are, of course, inherent risks associated with allowing Taiwan's image to become degraded. This needs to be balanced against Libya's strategic importance as a springboard into North Africa and the abundant oil resources of the country. ...

"As for concerns about upsetting the US, that has proven to be a non-issue. US State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said on Thursday that the relationship between his country and Libya has changed over the past few years, after Libya gave up its program to develop weapons of mass destruction. So, it is up to Taiwan and Libya whether they want to develop their bilateral relationship. The US has no qualms about the matter. The joke is that the pan-blue lawmakers are usually the first ones to jump up and accuse the Chen government of 'kissing up' to the US. Their anti-US sentiment has kept the arms procurement bill tied up in the Legislative Yuan for two years now. Since when have they been concerned about how the US feels about anything?"

YOUNG